

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 187947

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SUBJECT: PRESS ARTICLE ON US ARMS TO ETHIOPIA

FOR POSTS INFORMATION TEXT OF ARTICLE FROM WASHINGTON POST
AUGUST 26 DATELINE ADDIS ABABA BY DAVID OTTAWAY.

QUOTE - (TITLE) ETHIOPIA GETS NEW U.S. ARMS (SUB-TITLE)
SOMALIA THREAT EYED - (TEXT)

THE UNITED STATES HAS BEGUN DELIVERING HEAVY ARMS TO
ETHIOPIA TO OFFSET A STEADY BUILDUP OF SOVIET WEAPONS
IN NEIGHBORING SOMALIA.

IN THE PAST TWO WEEKS, AT LEAST SEVERAL DOZEN M-60
HEAVY TANKS HAVE ARRIVED HERE AND MORE ARE EXPECTED,
ACCORDING TO WESTERN DIPLOMATIC AND ETHIOPIAN SOURCES.
ALSO REPORTEDLY COMING IN ARE NEWER-MODEL HELICOPTERS
TO REPLACE OLDER ONES ALREADY BEING FLOWN BY THE ETHIOPIAN
AIR FORCE.

THE AMERICAN EMBASSY HERE REFUSED ALL COMMENT ON THE
REPORTS. QUOTE WE DON'T DISCUSS THE SPECIFICS OF WHAT
IS IN OUR (MILITARY ASSISTANCE) PROGRAM, UNQUOTE SAID
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PAGE 02 STATE 187947

THE U.S. CHARGE D'AFFAIRES, PARKER D. WYMAN.

THE AMERICAN DECISION TO SEND HEAVY ARMS APPEARS TO REPRESENT A REVERSAL IN RECENT OFFICIAL U.S. THINKING ABOUT THE SERIOUSNESS OF SOMALIA'S THREAT TO ETHIOPIA AND A CHANGE IN ATTITUDE TOWARD THE ETHIOPIAN ARGUMENT THAT THE IMBALANCE OF ARMS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA IS TIPPING DANGEROUSLY IN FAVOR OF THEIR SOVIET-BACKED SOMALI ENEMIES.

THIS DEVELOPMENT IS VIEWED AS SERIOUS IN LIGHT OF THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF BOTH ETHIOPIA AND SOMALIA, WHICH LIE IN IMPORTANT POSITIONS FOR CONTROLLING PASSAGE TO THE PERSIAN GULF, THE RED SEA AND THE SUEZ CANAL.

THE DECISION IS UNDERSTOOD TO HAVE BEEN TAKEN AT A NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING IN MAY, DURING WHICH SECRETARY OF STATE HENRY A. KISSINGER OVERRULED THE ADVICE OF BOTH STATE DEPARTMENT AND PENTAGON OFFICIALS AND ORDERED A MODERATE STEP-UP IN AMERICAN ARMS DELIVERIES TO THE U.S.-EQUIPPED ETHIOPIAN ARMED FORCES.

THE TANKS BEGAN ARRIVING HERE ABOUT A MONTH AFTER THE VISIT TO SOMALIA BY SOVIET PRESIDENT NIKOLAI PODGORNYY, WHO REPORTEDLY BROUGHT HIS HOSTS A GIFT OF SEVEN MIG-21 JET FIGHTERS. IT WAS THE FIRST TIME A TOP SOVIET LEADER HAS VISITED A BLACK SUB-SAHARAN COUNTRY.

THE SOVIETS ARE REPORTED TO NOW HAVE SEVERAL NAVAL AND AIR BASES IN SOMALIA, WHICH HAS A 1,700 MILE COASTLINE ALONG THE INDIAN OCEAN. MOSCOW RADIO CALLED PODGORNYY'S VISIT A QUOTE TIMELY RECONNAISSANCE. UNQUOTE

ONLY A FEW MONTHS AGO, STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS WERE ARGUING THAT ETHIOPIA HAD EXAGGERATED SOMALIA'S THREAT AND MILITARY CAPABILITY AND WAS MISREADING SOMALI INTENTIONS. THEY ALSO SAID THAT THE M-60 TANK IS UNSUITED TO THE KIND OF SEMI-DESERT WARFARE THAT MIGHT POSSIBLY ERUPT ALONG THE DISPUTED SOMALI-ETHIOPIAN BORDER.

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PAGE 03 STATE 187947

SOMALIA LAYS CLAIM TO ETHIOPIA'S EASTERN OGADEN REGION, AN AREA THAT REPRESENTS ALTOGETHER ABOUT A THIRD OF THIS MOUNTAIN KINGDOM'S ENTIRE TERRITORY. THE TWO COUNTRIES FOUGHT A BRIEF BORDER WAR IN 1964, AND EVER SINCE SOMALIA HAS BEEN PRESSING ITS CLAIM WITH INCREASING VIGOR. THE SHIPMENT OF SOVIET ARMS TO SOMALIA HAS ACCELERATED CONSIDERABLY SINCE 1972.

IT WAS NOT DISCLOSED HOW MANY TANKS OR NEW HELICOPTERS THE UNITED STATES IS SENDING ETHIOPIA, OR WHETHER PHANTOM JETS, FOR WHICH ADDIS ABABA HAS ALSO LONG CLAMORED, ARE ALSO INCLUDED IN THE CURRENT ARMS SHIPMENTS. HOWEVER, ETHIOPIAN SOURCES SAID THAT THE NUMBER OF M-60 TANKS AD WAS FAIRLY SMALL, AND THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS PAYING FOR SOME OF THEM ITSELF.

THE UNITED STATES HAS PROVIDED ETHIOPIA WITH ABOUT \$200 MILLION IN MILITARY ASSISTANCE SINCE WORLD WAR II EQUIPPING FOUR DIVISIONS AND PROVIDING MOST OF THE AIRCRAFT FLOWN BY THE AIR FORCE. RECENTLY, THE AMOUNT HAS VARIED BETWEEN \$10 MILLION AND 12 MILLION ANNUALLY, WITH A SLIGHT INCREASE SCHEDULED FOR THIS FISCAL YEAR.

WHEN EMPEROR HAILE SELASSIE VISITED WASHINGTON IN 1973 HE TOOK WITH HIM A SHOPPING LIST FOR ABOUT A HALF BILLION DOLLARS WORTH OF TANKS, AIRCRAFT, MISSILES AND OTHER MILITARY EQUIPMENT. THE EMPEROR'S POSITION OF LEADERSHIP HSDD HAS BEEN SEVERELY ERODED BY THE ETHIOPIAN MILITARY SINCE THAT VISIT, AND THE U.S. GOVERNMENT HAS PUT OFF A DECISION ON THE ARMS REQUEST.

STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS HAVE SAID PRIVATELY, HOWEVER, THAT THERE IS NO CHANCE THE UNITED STATES WILL MEET THE REQUEST. THEY POINT OUT THAT THERE IS A CONGRESSIONALLY IMPOSED CEILING FOR \$40 MILLION ON GRANT MILITARY ASSISTANCE FOR ALL OF AFRICA, AND THAT ETHIOPIA IS ALREADY GETTING A LARGE SHARE OF THIS.

THE ETHIOPIANS ARGUE THAT ADVANCED AMERICAN MILITARY EQUIPMENT IS ESSENTIAL TO OFFSET THE CONTINUING BUILDUP OF SOVIET ARMS IN SOMALIA. THIS INCLUDES A SQUADRON
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PAGE 04 STATE 187947

EACH OF MIG-21S AND IL-28 BOMBERS, MORE THAN 200 MEDIUM T-34 AND HEAVIER T-54 SOVIET TANKS, AT LEAST 300 ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIERS AND A NUMBER OF SA-2 MISSILES, ACCORDING TO WESTERN, ETHIOPIAN AND KENYAN MILITARY SOURCES.

ALTOGETHER, SOMALIA IS THOUGHT TO HAVE AROUND 50 MIGS AND BOMBERS COMPARED TO ETHIOPIA'S 37 COMBAT AIRCRAFT, INCLUDING 12 F-86S AND 15 F-5 JET FIGHTERS - WHICH ARE NO MATCH FOR THE SOMALIAN MIGS.

ETHIOPIA'S ARMED FORCES ARE FAR LARGER THAN THOSE OF SOMALIA, ABOUT 40,000 COMPARED TO APPROXIMATELY 15,000.

BUT THE SOMALIAN ARMY - WHICH APPEARS FAR MORE MOBILE

AND MECHANIZED THAN THE ETHIOPIAN, IS EQUIPPED WITH FAR SUPERIOR TANK POWER, AS IF ORGANIZED FOR A SWIFT STRIKE IN MIDDLE EASTERN-STYLE DESERT WARFARE.

SOMALIA HAS FOUR TANK BATTALIONS COMPARED TO ETHIOPIA'S ONE WITH NO HEAVY TANKS UNTIL NOW, AND MORE THAN TWICE THE 126 ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIERS AND OTHER ARMORED CARS OF THE ETHIOPIAN ARMED FORCES.

THERE ARE ABOUT 2,000 SOVIET ADVISERS IN SOMALIA PLUS SEVERAL HUNDRED CUBAN AND NORTH KOREAN MILITARY PERSONNEL, ACCORDING TO WESTERN AND ETHIOPIAN SOURCES. THIS COMPARES TO AN AMERICAN MILITARY ADVISORY GROUP NOW REDUCED TO AROUND 80 PERSONS IN ETHIOPIA.

WESTERN DIPLOMATS HAVE LONG DOUBTED THAT THE SOMALIS ARE CAPABLE OF USING OR MAINTAINING MUCH OF THE SOVIET EQUIPMENT THEY HAVE RECEIVED. FOR INSTANCE, THERE IS ONE PRESS REPORT THAT ONLY ABOUT A QUARTER OF THE TANKS IN THE SOMALI INVENTORY ARE IN WORKING ORDER. BUT NOT ALL OF ETHIOPIA'S TANKS AND AIRCRAFT ARE RUNNING, EITHER.

THE ETHIOPIANS ARGUE THAT IT IS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE THE SOMALIS LEARN HOW TO USE THE SOVIET ARMS, AND THEY POINT WITH APPREHENSION TO THE UNANTICIPATED UNCLASSIFIED

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PAGE 05 STATE 187947

PROGRESS OF THE EGYPTIAN FORCES IN USING MODERN SOVIET WEAPONS IN THE LAST MIDDLE EAST WAR. THEY SEEM TO FEAR A SURPRISE UPSET IN MUCH THE SAME MANNER AS THE ISRAELIS IN THEIR WAR WITH THE ARABS LAST OCTOBER.

THE ETHIOPIANS ARE ALSO FEARFUL THAT SOMALIA MAY TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ETHIOPIA'S CURRENT POLITICAL TURMOIL TO STRIKE AGAINST THEM. BUT WESTERN DIPLOMATS DOUBT THAT SOMALIA WILL GO TO WAR IN THE NEXT YEAR OR SO BECAUSE ITS PRESIDENT, MAJ. GEN. SIAD BARRE, IS CURRENTLY PRESIDENT OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY. KISSINGER

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